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BUSINESS AND EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS CALL FOR NATIONAL STEM FUND TO IMPROVE EDUCATION IN FLORIDA

Strengthening STEM Education is Vital to Stronger, More Competitive U.S.

Tallahassee, Fla. (April 18, 2013) – As Florida grapples with a lack of students entering science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields, STEM Florida, the Manufacturers Association of Florida, the Florida High Tech Corridor Council, Hispanic CREO, the Association of Florida Colleges, the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida, and the Florida State Hispanic Chamber of Commerce today commended the Senate Gang of Eight's bi-partisan immigration reform proposal for acknowledging that reform legislation should also include a long-term solution to improving science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education.

The organizations support a STEM education fund that would provide a comprehensive STEM-dedicated stream of funds to all states and allow states the flexibility to target funds to any of the STEM fields including computer science. However, while the bill falls short of those important goals, they are hopeful Congress will make the proposed STEM fund more robust in the final legislation.

The Gang of Eight's bill is a good first step toward immigration reform, including reform of the high-skilled visas program that will help address the nation's current STEM jobs gap, because thousands of jobs across the U.S. remain unfilled due to the lack of qualified workers to fill these technical roles.

"Our nation's policymakers in Washington should not miss the opportunity to transform the country's STEM education system by investing in the education and training of more Americans in science and technology fields in Florida and other states," said Nancy Stephens, executive director of the Manufacturers Association of Florida.

"There is a solution to the STEM education crisis and the STEM jobs crisis," Jimmie Davis, STEM Florida President said. "Congress can fix the STEM education pipeline and make sure America is training the high-skilled workers we need to fill the fast growing jobs that spur American innovation and can move the U.S. economy forward."

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) the U.S. economy will create 120,000 jobs a year in computer science through 2020. However, U.S. institutions of higher learning only produce 40,000 bachelor's degrees annually in that field leaving a detrimental shortage of qualified workers to fill critical positions with American companies here in the U.S.

In Florida, the number of STEM jobs are projected to increase by 19% from 2008-2018, compared to 12.2% job growth for Florida's economy as a whole. The unemployment rate in Florida's STEM industries stands at 5%, compared to 11% in non-STEM industries.

Nationally, just 24,782 U.S. students took the AP Computer Science exam in 2012, which is less than 0.7 percent of all AP exams taken last year. In 2000, that percentage was 1.6. This achievement rate in American classrooms is not supporting the rapid growth of STEM jobs in the American economy.

“Our schools are constantly handing out diplomas to graduating doctoral candidate who have earned degrees in the sciences, only to see them have to leave the US soon after graduation,” said Dr. Ed Moore, President of the Independent Colleges and Universities of Florida. “They go home to their country of origin to work for business and industry in competition with the US.”

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